

Voter Education by the Independent National Electoral Commission and Political Participation among Residents of South-South, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The research work Investigated Voter education by the Independent National Electoral Commission and Political Participation among residents of South-South Nigeria. The objective was to ascertain the extent INEC's Voter Education strategy has Promoted Political Participation among residents of South-South Nigeria. Sunkyu research method was used for the study while questionnaire was adopted as data collection instrument. The 30.221.345 residents of South-South geopolitical Zone was used as the population of the study form were a sample size of 385 was drawn using the Australian National Bureau of Statistics online sample calculator. The multi-stage sampling technique was used for the study while simple percentage were deployed in analyzing the calculated data. Based on the analysis of data findings revealed that INEC's Voter Education messages have not effectively promoted political participation among respondents and this finding is in agreement with Carter Centre for research (2013) revealed that Voter Education has not adequately mobilized the youths for political participation. Based on the findings, the study recommended that INEC Voter Education messages should be well thought-out and designed to ensure effective political participation in the electoral process through the use of the combination of traditional, conventional and the social media for optional sensitization.

How to cite this paper: Paleowei Zikena Cletus "Voter Education by the Independent National Electoral Commission and Political Participation among Residents of South-South, Nigeria" Published in International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd), ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-7 | Issue-3, June 2023, pp.67-83,

URL: www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd56313.pdf



IJTSRD56313

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KEYWORDS: Voter Education, Political Participation

1. INTRODUCTION:

1.1. Background of the Study

Preparing for an election involves extensive planning. An efficient electoral body often has detailed policies and procedures for all aspects of the process, but the best policies and procedures are helpful only if they are well publicized. An election official's effort to educate and communicate with the public has a direct effect on the voters' chances of having a successful election experience. Getting started is sometimes the hardest part. An electoral body first, needs to define whom it serves. Who are the target audience? What are the most common questions the audience ask? How do the audience get their information? These questions and answers are the beginning of a communication strategy targeted at the electoral body's respective audience. An electoral agency that prepares well thought out messages ahead of time will increase efficiency and save resources—people and funding resources that are needed to make sure the

election runs smoothly after voting begins. With the strategy, the agency will also encourage discipline and structure and may reduce the chances of inaccurate or unconfirmed information being delivered to the public. Of course, the election official always expects the unexpected and should be prepared to communicate about developing situations and changes or other unforeseen circumstances. Being prepared helps the electoral body to keep the public informed and minimizes interruptions during the election cycle (United State Election Assistance Commission, 2010).

In Nigeria, Section 2 (a) and (b), as well as Section 154 of the Electoral Act 2010 establish the power of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to conduct voter and civic education. According to Section 2 of the Act, "In addition to the

functions conferred on it by the Constitution, the Commission shall have power to: (a) conduct voter and civic education. (b) Promote knowledge of sound democratic election processes". This legal power of the Commission has often been interpreted to mean that the Commission has a principal responsibility to conduct voter and civic education. Consequently, other traditional agencies of civic and voter education expect the Commission to take the lead on this. Over the years, the Commission has been increasing its budgetary allocation to voter education. In spite of this growing budgetary outlay on voter education, the impact on knowledge of voters remains unclear. This raises a number of questions regarding the capacity of the Commission to conduct civic and voter education on its own, the appropriateness and reach of materials, the adequacy of the strategies adopted. It also raises the issues of burden sharing and above all the need to understand how voter and civic education is carried out in other countries (Ibeanu, 2014).

A look at the strategic objectives of INEC's civic and voter education programme and the Commission's strategic communication programme of action for the implementation of its civic and voter education activities indicates that three major groups are the key targets. These groups are the general electorate, high-impact groups such as traditional and religious leaders, and marginalized populations like women and persons with disabilities. INEC attempted to reach the general electorate through public enlightenment, but this strategy faced many challenges including differences of access by urban and rural residents, and voters with different backgrounds, languages, religious beliefs, cultures, geographic accessibility, and literacy levels. Although an outreach approach that is focused on specific groups and extending to hard-to-reach areas is ideal in theory, it is not very practical in real terms. Leveraging the reach of high-impact groups can be effective and cost efficient, as this form of outreach uses an established network that people already trust. During elections, INEC utilizes high-impact groups in mobilizing the electorates for voter registration and the elections. INEC organizes town hall meetings and other events in which the Commission engages with high-impact groups. When a group mandate does not conflict with education messages or cause message distortion, the group may offer a highly effective channel of communication. More so, a key component of INEC's strategic communication programme of action on civic and voter education is the formulation and implementation of programmes that will ensure the participation of marginalized groups (orji, 2014).

The most important goal of voter education must be to raise the level of confidence and improve people's judgment about the electoral process, the election management body and, therefore, the value of the vote or ballot. The value attached to the vote is particularly important in a market democracy. In the same way the value of money signifies robustness of the market economy, so does the value of the vote signify the virility of market democracy. We may approach the value of the vote from three dimensions: promissory value, content value and psychological value. Promissory value of a vote refers to the promises made by those who ask for the vote to deliver the value of a vote on demand, in terms of programmes (manifesto) for which they have received the vote. The more these promises are kept, the higher the promissory value of a vote. This is akin to the promise behind the issuance of paper money, whereby the Central Bank promises to pay on demand the equivalent of that money (Ibeanu, 2014).

An electoral body's first step in formulating a message for the people is to define the audiences. Most electoral bodies have two major audiences: the voters and the candidates. The media may also work to inform the public on a mass scale, but it is the key responsibility of the elections office to act as the official resource for accurate and timely election information. After the identification of the audiences, the agency can determine the kind of information voters and candidates want and the best ways to disseminate that information. One of the biggest challenges an election official faces is presenting and organizing a large amount of information in a logical, intuitive manner so that people can easily find the information they seek. One approach is to categorize all the available information into topic areas and then implement across multiple platforms, including Web sites, which have become the primary information delivery tool for many jurisdictions (United State Election Assistance Commission, 2010).

1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

For electoral bodies to effectively conduct credible elections, such body must take critical steps to properly educate the people regarding the elections. This is because if the people are well informed about the electoral process, it makes the conduct of the elections easier for the electoral body. The implication is that the electoral body must properly engage in voter education to achieve a successful electoral process.

The right to vote can only be understood in the context of awareness of democratic culture and processes, the rights of the individual and minorities, the rule of law and role of government in a

democracy. UNDP report, (2013) described increased participation of a well-informed citizenry in democratic processes, including elections; as a way of influencing decision-making on matters that affect their lives. To make sensible choices, however, citizens must be aware of an elections purpose, their voting rights and obligations, the dates and procedures, the range of electoral options, and they must know how to vote. The goal of voter education is to make information available and accessible to all constituents (Rackner and Svasand, 2005).

By way of definition, voter education is the process by which citizens are educated on how to register and vote, develop a sense of civic duty to participate in the electoral process, and learn to respect the outcome of legitimate elections. It is non-formal public education meant to inform and empower the voters to clearly understand their rights and responsibilities in the electoral process. It strives to improve the process of democracy and mobilize voters to exercise their rights in politics (Jennings, 1999).

The role of voter education in any electoral process cannot be under estimated. It is very important that voter education is given in order for election to be successful. Voters are ready, willing and able to participate in electoral politics when enough education had been given. Voter education involves election literacy, educational campaign and confidences that the electoral process is appropriate and effective in selecting their representative through the electoral process. Voter education aims at creating a climate of knowledgeable participation by all potential voters in an election. It also seeks to enable potential voters to cast their vote with confidence and achieve stipulated objective. These objectives may also be achieved through other programmes, and the campaign you want to establish or address such issues as: voter security, basic voting procedures, accessible voting stations and lively but non-violent political campaign by candidate (Akintyo, 2010).

Voter education is a critical element in building voters' confidence. The electoral management body should be strategic and proactive in providing information on how to vote, how the overall system works, why a new technology has been adopted and methods to ensure the system's integrity. Voter education strategies should consider the target audiences and use different types of outreach methods based on how different segments of voters commonly access information. Particular consideration should be given to targeting groups, such as voters with disabilities, and rural and elderly voters, that may be less comfortable with technology. It is also important to provide opportunities for voters to try out the new

voting equipment in person. Election observers have a responsibility to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of voter education efforts and make recommendations on how any identified gaps can be filled (National Democratic Institute, 2013).

These problems of rejected ballots, declining turnout at elections and other electoral anomalies are widely attributed both directly and indirectly to inadequate civic and voter education. Thus, numerous reports on elections in Nigeria call on INEC to strengthen voter education. Other issues that have been linked to voter and civic education in Nigeria includes, poor turnout and participation in voter registration, lack of understanding of voting procedures, underage voting and election violence. In fact, it has been noted that the violence that Nigeria has experienced in the aftermath of elections was partly due to negative mobilization by political leaders and by implication inadequate voter education (Ibeanu and Mbah, 2012) cited in (Ibeanu, 2014).

In view of the above, the study is to find out from the masses how well INEC's voter Education efforts have been able to encourage political participation in Nigeria.

1.3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To determine the level of influence INEC's voter education messages on the awareness of voting procedures among resident of South-South, Nigeria.
2. To ascertain the extent INEC's Voter Education Strategy has promoted political participation among residents of South-South, Nigeria.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What level of influence has INEC's voter education messages on the awareness of voting procedures among residents of South-South Nigeria?
2. To what extent has INEC's voter education strategy promoted political participation among residents of South-South Nigeria?

1.5. Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will be tested to ascertain the relationship between the dependent and independent variables;

1.5.1. Hypothesis one

Ho: There is no significant relationship between the comprehension of INEC's electoral materials and the knowledge of the Electoral Act.

1.5.2. Hypothesis two

Ho: comprehension of INEC's voter education materials is not significantly related to participation in elections.

1.6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study shall be useful to INEC as it shall enable the Commission to determine the efficiency of its voter Education messages in raising political participation among residents of South-South, Nigeria. This suggests that the study shall serve as a feedback mechanism to INEC in the quest to raise political participation through well thought out voter Education strategy. The study shall serve as a valuable literature, provides current empirical data and add to available literature to future researchers who engage in similar studies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Civic and voter education are not limited to knowledge as a cognitive orientation. It also encompasses affective and evaluation orientations. In fact, civic and voter education is the inculcation in the citizen, of positive orientations towards democratic structures and objects at the cognitive, affective and evaluative levels. By cognitive orientation is meant “knowledge of and belief about” democracy and specifically, the electoral process. Affective orientation refers to feelings, particularly confidence and level of trust in the electoral process, while evaluative orientation has to do with the judgments of the citizens towards democracy and the electoral process. These orientations could be towards the system as a whole, towards input objects, towards output objects and towards the self as a democratic object. Regarding input and output objects, the positive orientation may be towards roles, structures, incumbents or policies (Almond and Verba, 1989; cited Ibeanu, 2014).

The pride of any democratically elected Government is enhanced, when the voter turnout gets close to 100%. This is only possible if voter apathy which is a growing concern in many democracies is reduced through Voter Education. In transitional contexts, voter education programmes should not simply focus on teaching voters to learn where, when and how to vote. They should also work to convince voters that voting will make a difference. It encompasses the basic voter information that every voter must have in order to arrive prepared at the voting station and vote on the set voting day. Voter education sensitizes the electorates on the importance of participating in elections that stimulate and consolidate democracy (Electoral Commission of Kenya, 2007; Jennings, 1999; Gadana, 2015).

Voter education has a tradition that is as long and as brief as the conduct of modern elections. Civic education, on the other hand, has antecedents in both the development of ancient democracy and state formation. Universal education in the modern,

democratic state was itself intended to promote and support democracy. Those waging campaigns for extension of the franchise also conducted public information and education programmes. The League of Women Voters in the United States, for example, retains a strong, non-partisan programme to ensure that voters make informed political choices. Voter education has long been the domain of electoral management authorities. More recently, however, organisations active in educating and mobilizing voters, as well as broader issues of citizenship and democracy, have become more diversified (Fiel, 2018).

Today, those interested and involved in voter education come from a broad range of backgrounds. Some may have a background in electoral administration. Others may have experience in civic education, public advocacy, conflict resolution, mass communication, training, or primary, secondary, advanced or adult education. Some may have worked extensively with special constituencies such as youth, the elderly, the handicapped, ethnic or linguistic minorities, or women. Their backgrounds are likely to influence the approach, style, content and audience of the voter education programmes with which they are involved. Social and political context within which an election or a referendum takes place has a fundamental impact on the voter education programme that supports it. Any voter education initiative will be heavily influenced by the history and socio-political environment within which it is planned and implemented (Katie, 2019).

There are methodologies that are generally relevant and the selection of which may be determined as much by educational goals and ideology as by local context. At the same time, however, there will be goals determined primarily by the context. This is especially true when the goals are closely linked to the political and electoral environment. Unfortunately, not all voter education materials available for reference make explicit the circumstances under which they were developed. The inclusion of such information could make these materials more useful, and might even provoke the use of existing materials in similar contexts even if these are separated in time and geography (Mark, 2018).

Voter Education, Communication Platforms and Political Awareness and Participation

After the electoral body has established the messages and has determined the most pressing topic areas, the next is to decide on how to provide election information to the public. Several tools for presenting information include fact sheets, press releases,

brochures, videos, frequently asked questions, maps, internet platforms as well as the traditional media. For all of these tools, the electoral body might consider ensuring that the language is simple, direct, and easy to follow. The agency might use active, not passive, language and could avoid bureaucratic terminology that those outside the field of election administration might not understand. The United States Election Assistance Commission recommends convening a small group that is representative of the people who will use these materials to review drafts and provide feedback about their usability. An electoral body might develop the following materials for dissemination through various communication platforms: Registration lookup, polling place locator, election calendar, voter's guide, sample ballots, information kits, historical data, etc (United State Election Assistance Commission, 2010).

Electoral participation is one of the three main indicators of democratic performance (Powell, 1982). According to Dalton (1988), citizen involvement in the political process is essential for democracy to be viable and meaningful. Voting, though it requires little initiative and cooperation with others, is the most visible and widespread form of citizen involvement. This notwithstanding, electoral turnout is declining in most democracies (Blais 2000; Gray and Caul; 2000). Moreover, voters turnout varies considerably both overtime and across countries and individuals (Lassen; 2005). This variation is not random and electoral participation seems to be highly unequal and biased in favor of more privileged citizens—those with higher incomes, greater wealth and better education, and against less disadvantaged citizens. (Liphart 1997). According to Vergue (2009), this may prevent elections to properly perform their three key functions—to discipline the elected officials by threat of not being reappointed (accountability effect), to select competent individuals for public office (legitimacy effect), and to reflect the preferences of a large spectrum of voters (representative effect). The accountability effect is straightforward.

Elections affect the incentives facing politicians. When officials anticipate that they would not be reelected if they did not perform, it makes them not to shirk their obligations to the voters in the present (Verge, 2009, Marin 1997, Ferejohn; 1986, Fiorina 1981; and Baro 1973). Election is therefore seen as a sanctioning device that induces elected officials to act in the best interest of the people. However, one vital condition that affects political accountability is the competitive electoral mechanism and at the core of the electoral mechanism is the vote. The vote is the

primary thing for citizens to make their governments accountable. If a large fraction of citizens don't create their opinions, elections would create no incentives for politicians to espouse or implement policies in the public interest (Dalton 2007; Rakner and svS and 2005; English 2005; Chinisinger 2004; Ezeani; 2004 Ballington 2001; and Ragoff 1990). All this notwithstanding, elections in developing nations have been characterized by lack of feeling of personal responsibility, a passivity and indifference for political affairs which could be viewed as apathy.

Efforts toward political awareness and participation involve the use of best available communication, information, and education technologies and methodologies. Practice rather than prescription becomes the norm. As a result, the effort is driven by a commitment to an informed and invigorated electorate rather than to a set of readily discernible principles. This has made it possible for each national election enterprise to reconsider the important themes, methods, educational practice, available resources, and domestic limitations that govern not only the general voter and civic education programmes that might repeat from one year to the next, but also the specific programme necessary for each election, referendum, or plebiscite (Electoral Knowledge Network, 2016).

INEC's strategic programme of action in raising political awareness and participation focused among others on public enlightenment with emphasis on erection of bill boards, printing of hand bills and posters, as well as dissemination of messages through SMS. The commission noted in its report that it undertook elaborate public enlightenment and voter education programme before the elections through the print and electronic media. Bill boards were strategically located throughout the country as part of the programme. In addition, the Commission maintained that its public enlightenment programme, 'INEC Half Hour', on private and government-owned television networks was strengthened both in content and form to function as a major voter enlightenment platform. This was in addition to the Electoral Magazine; an in-house periodical, the daily Bulletin, as well as the Commission's website (Orji, 2014).

More so, the Commission reported that its voter enlightenment programme got an unprecedented boost through the utilization of conventional public education strategies (such as jingles, drama, sketches, advertisements, commentaries, sponsored editorials, posters, handbills, stickers, face-caps, messages-bearing T-shirts and wrist bands) and non-formal channels (such as town criers, staging of live dramas, public enlightenment tours, engagement with

community-based organizations, opinion leaders). The message contents of INEC's public enlightenment programme focus on voter registration procedures, the accreditation and voting process, responsibilities of political parties, rights, duties and obligations of voters as well as anti-violence campaigns. The messages also highlight the locations of polling and registration centers, lists of candidates for clearing or verification, and dates and locations of specific electoral activities such as voter registration, display of preliminary list of voters to enable claims and objections (Orji, 2014).

Mode of voter education range from printed flyers and posters in public spaces to telephone hotlines, newspaper advertisements, mobile brigades and kiosks, radio and television ads, websites, direct mailings, and text messaging. Such voter education activities are typically considered the responsibility of electoral management bodies, although civil society organizations also often carry out similar activities. In conducting voter education programmes in unsafe areas of a country, extra care must be taken to protect the security of citizens and educators on the way to education events. Broadcast media may be the most appropriate tool for voter education in these contexts. Some argue that if the media provide useful information, citizens can attain the political knowledge they need. Some political learning does in fact take place during campaigns, and public discussion and voters use their knowledge, however little, to inform their decisions (Jerit, Jason & Bolsen, 2006; Ellis, Gratschew, Pammett, & Thiessen, 2006; Brady, 2009; ACE Project 2013).

As earlier stated, an electoral body such as INEC is expected to provide timely and accurate information to the public during elections via different communication platforms. One of such communication platforms is the traditional news media. The traditional news media can play a vital role in helping to meet this responsibility. Because the electoral body and the media have common goals—they both want to inform the public, explain the process, and report developments before, during, and after the elections—their partnership is natural. Because working together makes sense, the electoral body needs to understand what the media might need and how to get the information they want to disseminate to the public. To provide information efficiently in this partnership, an electoral body might prepare a media kit for reporters, who need the following information about all elections: number of registered voters, number of absentee voters, historical turnout, registration dates, sample ballots, and polling place information (United State Election Assistance Commission, 2010).

Mass media have been found to be the main source of voter information. In this regard, there is need for the media to inform and inform adequately. Objectivity is key, subjectivity is out. Media reports in order to educate and enlighten the electorate in the context of successful elections must encompass the 5Ws & H. Media reports should not just stop at generalizations such as “the election was successful”. If you say elections were successful, then show the how and why of the report (Okon, 2015).

Voter education is to make information available and accessible to all constituents using various communication platforms with the ultimate aim of improving the citizens' level of awareness and herald enhanced participation. The communication channels should be aimed at achieving coverage of all the electorate. Effective voter Education Campaign starts early and continuous through the electoral process. Very early in the process, eligible voters should be informed about voter registration process so they have ample time to register. They should be told how and where to check their respective voter lists to ensure that their entries are correct. Voters should be informed on: the type of election to be held, the polling data and location, when the polling station will be opened and How to cast their ballots. These messages should be communicated to the people through different means to enhance their awareness of the process (Agyiri, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

Perception Theory

The perception theory was used to explain this study. The theory was propounded by Berelson and Steiner in 1964. Perception theory is of the assumption that the actions and activities of an individual, group or organisation significantly shape the perception of people on such individual, group or organisation. The implication of this assumption is that what a person or an organisation does gives other people certain impression which ultimately becomes people's perception of such person or organisation. This is in line with the popular saying that “one would be judged by his/her actions.”

Perception according to Bovee, Thill, Dovel and Wood (1995, p.97) is the process of being exposed to a stimulus, paying attention to some degree, and then interpreting the received message. It has to do with a receiver's assessment or view on the received message. Hence, perception involves the process of exposure, attention and interpretation. In other words, for perception to take place there must be exposure to stimuli with certain level of attention paid to the stimuli and finally the stimuli are interpreted by the audience. Among the assumption of perception theory

according to Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osijeso (2008,p.66), are that “communicators want audiences to pay attention to their messages, and make appropriate changes in attitudes or beliefs, or produce the desired behavioural responses”.

As earlier asserted, perception involves the process of being exposed to a stimulus, paying attention to some degree, and then interpreting the received message. From time to time, INEC transmit a number of information in accordance with the Commission’s voter education efforts using various to raise political awareness as well as bring enhanced political participation among the citizens. Residents of South-South Nigeria may be exposed to the messages, accord attention to such messages and assess the quality/effectiveness of the messages with respect to raising their political awareness as well as getting them to participation in politics.

METHODOLOGY

The survey research method was used to carry out the study. The choice of this research method was predicted on the nature of the study which involved eliciting responses of residents of South-South Nigeria on subject of investigation. Winner and Dominick (2005 P.17) notes that studies concerning Public Assessment, perception of response on the issued and may impact studies definitely require the survey design.

The residents of the South-South Zone constituted the population of the study. A breakdown of the population of the zone according to the 2006 population census shuns: Akwa Ibom has 3,902.05.

Bayelsa has 1.704.515, Cross River has 2.892.998, Delta has 4.112.445, Edo has 2.176.947 while Rivers has 5.198.716. This implies that the Zone has a total population of 19.987.662.

To ensure the population is up to date to year 2022 the researcher did a projection using an annual growth Nations Development Programmed (UNDP). The projection formula provided that $PP = GP \times Pi \times I$

Where PP = Projected Population

GP = Given Population (as at last census)

Pi = Population Increase Index

Pi = Period between the given population and year of study.

Thus $PP = 19.987.662$, $Pi = 3.2\%$ or 0.032 , $2006 - 2022 = 16$

$PP = 19.987.662 \times 0.032 \times 16 = 10.233.683$

Going by this projection, the population of South – South geographical zone increased over the last sixteen years after the 2006 census by 10.233.683. When added to the population, it gave $19.987.662 + 10.233.683 = 30.221.345$. Based on the projection, the Population of the study, therefore 30.221.345.

Due to the Largeness of the population size for the study, the researcher systematically selected a manageable but representative sample size for the study. In determining the sample size Australian National Bureau of statics online sample size calculator shall be used with a confidence level of 95% and confidence interval of 0.05.

Sample Size Calculator	
Confidence Level:	95% 99%
Confidence Interval (%):	30.221.345
Population size: Do not use commas	28942134
Calculate	Clear
Sample size needed:	385

Step:

1. Confidence level: click desired level
2. Confidence interval: enter %, such as 4.9 or 5.0
3. Population: enter size if finite; otherwise, leave blank.
4. Hit calculate button

RETURN TO WIMMER DOMINICK

Going by what is on the calculator, the sample size was 385

The sampling procedure that was used for this study is the multi-stage sampling technique. Osuala (2005,p.134) asserts that “it is a sampling technique where more than one stage of selection is used... Clusters are often geographical areas such as local government, wards or institution, such as schools, hospitals and employee... A three-stage sample has three separate stages of selection, for example, selection from states, local governments, and then wards.” This technique, which is also known as multistage sampling calls for the use of several

sampling methods or stages of a particular method in ensuring true representation, especially when the population is large and complex (Chukwuemeka, 2002, p.111). In line with the above, the stage of sampling technique that will be used for this study are presented below:

Stage one: Cluster sampling technique was used to categorise the six (6) state of the zone into six clusters. The states are Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers state

Stage two: In the state are local government areas, the purposive sampling technique was used to select the state capital of each of the states on the basis of media concentration and easy accessibility. This implication is that Uyo was studied for Akwa-Ibom State, Benin City was studied for Edo State while for Rivers, Port-Harcourt was studied.

Stage three: In the selected state were individuals. The researcher purposively administered the instrument on only those who were exposed to INEC's voter education messages.

Sequel to the research design chosen for the study, the researcher used questionnaire as the measuring instrument. The instrument is considered very appropriate because it helped to generate data that were very expedient in addressing the research question of the study. The instrument were divided into two-sections A and B. Section A constituted questions that were helpful in eliciting the demographics of the respondents while section B contained questions that aimed at eliciting responses which helped in addressing the research questions.

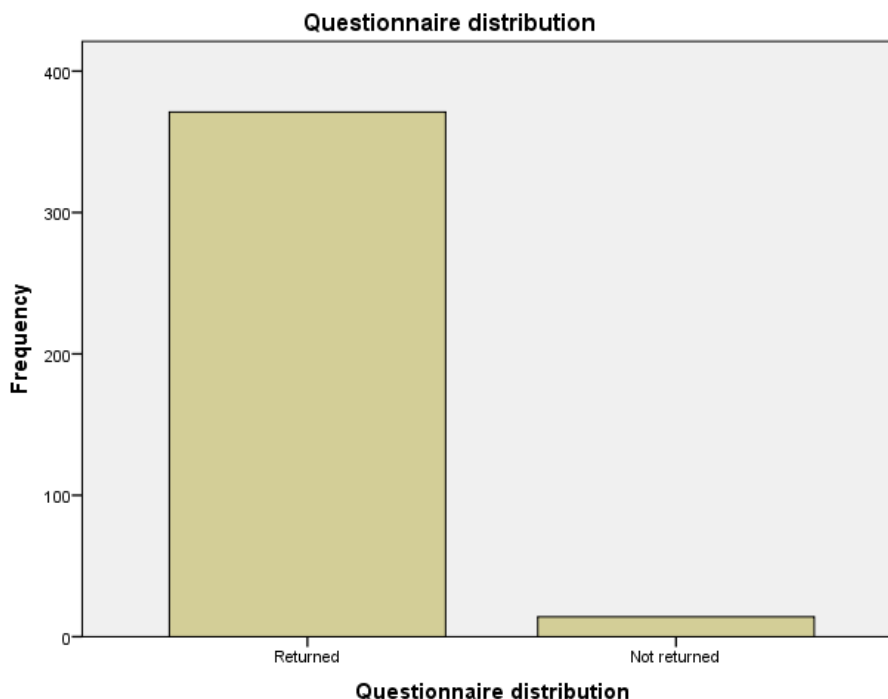
Copies of the questionnaire were administered on the respondents with the help of seven research assistants. After administering the questionnaire, the researcher as well as the research assistants waited for about 6 minutes to collect the administered copies from the respondents. There was also provision for interpretation of the questions in indigenous languages to respondents who may not be able to communicate in English language. At the end of the administration and collection of copies of the instrument, the generated data were analysed using simple percentages and presented in tables with the aid of the statistical package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. This statistical package would be very helpful for the analysis of the collected data. As already indicated, it shall be carefully deployed to properly analyse the collected data including the test of the hypotheses.

Data presentation

The data collected were analysed and presented below

Table and Chat 1: Questionnaire distribution

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Returned	371	96.4	96.4	96.4
	Not returned	14	3.6	3.6	100.0
	Total	385	100.0	100.0	



The above table and chart (1) show that 371 copies of the questionnaire were distributed. A total of 371 copies representing 96.4% were returned while 14 copies representing 3.6% were not returned. Consequently, the returned 371 copies were used for the study.

Table and Chat 2: Gender of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	197	53.1	53.1	53.1
	Female	174	46.9	46.9	100.0
	Total	371	100.0	100.0	

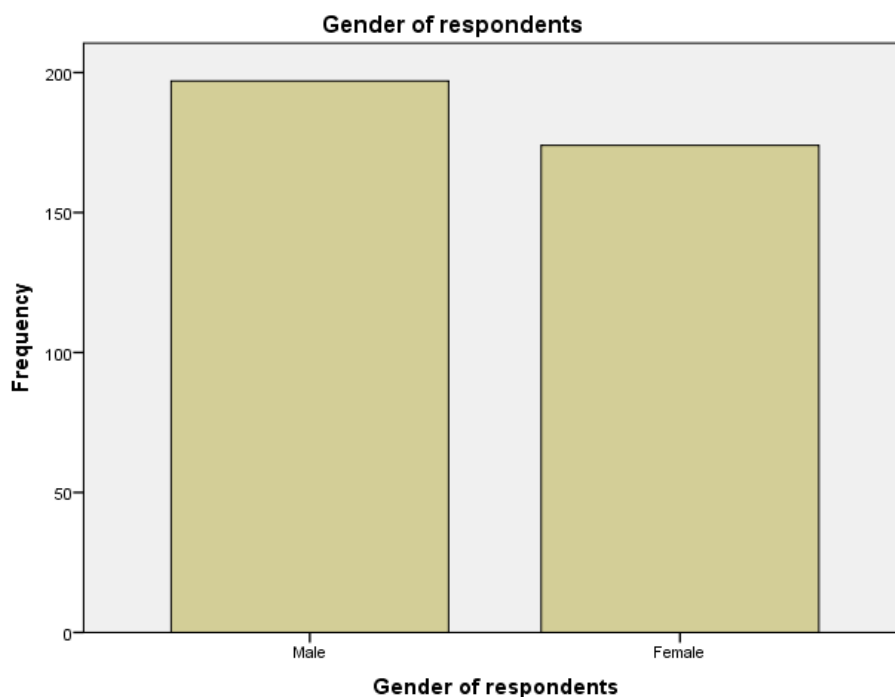


Table and chart 2 above show that 197 respondents representing 53.1% were male while 174 respondents representing 46.9% were female. The implication is that male respondents were more than the female.

Table and Chat 3: Age brackets of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-30	143	38.5	38.5	38.5
	31-40	171	46.1	46.1	84.6
	41-50	53	14.3	14.3	98.9
	51 and above	4	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	371	100.0	100.0	

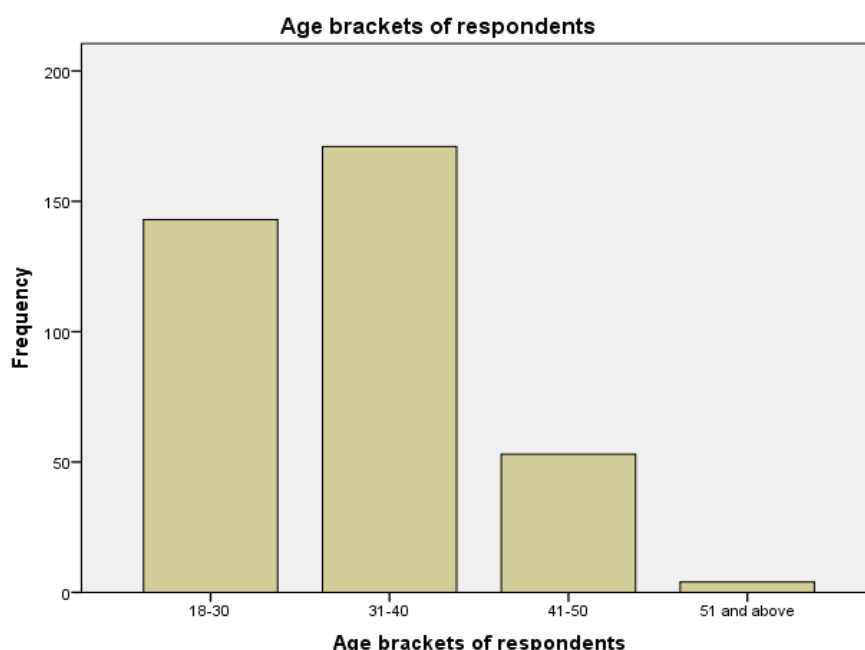


Table and chart 3 above show that 143 respondents representing 38.5% were in the age bracket of 18-30, 171 respondents representing 46.1% were in the age range of 31-40, 53 respondents representing 14.3% were in the bracket of 41-50 while 4 respondents representing 1.1% were in the range of 51 and above.

Table and Chat 4: Marital Statues of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Single	202	54.4	54.4	54.4
	Married	161	43.4	43.4	97.8
	Divorced	2	.5	.5	98.4
	Widowed	6	1.6	1.6	100.0
	Total	371	100.0	100.0	

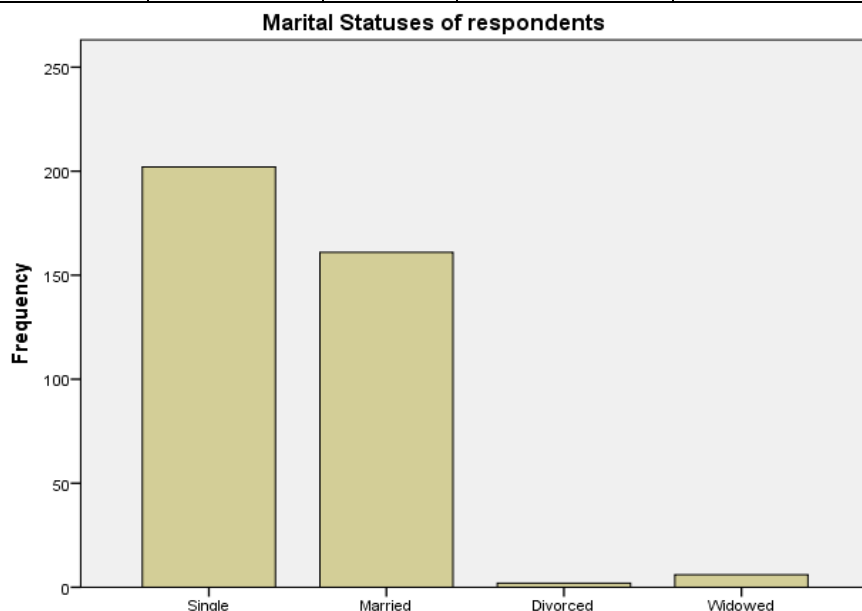


Table and chart 4 above show that 202 respondents representing 54.4% were single, 161 respondents representing 43.4% were married, 2 respondents representing 0.5% were divorced while 6 respondents representing 1.6% were widowed.

Table and Chat 5: Respondents' highest academic qualifications

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SSCE	74	19.9	19.9	19.9
	OND/NCE	116	31.3	31.3	51.2
	HND/Bachelor's Degree	138	37.2	37.2	88.4
	Higher Degree	43	11.6	11.6	100.0
	Total	371	100.0	100.0	

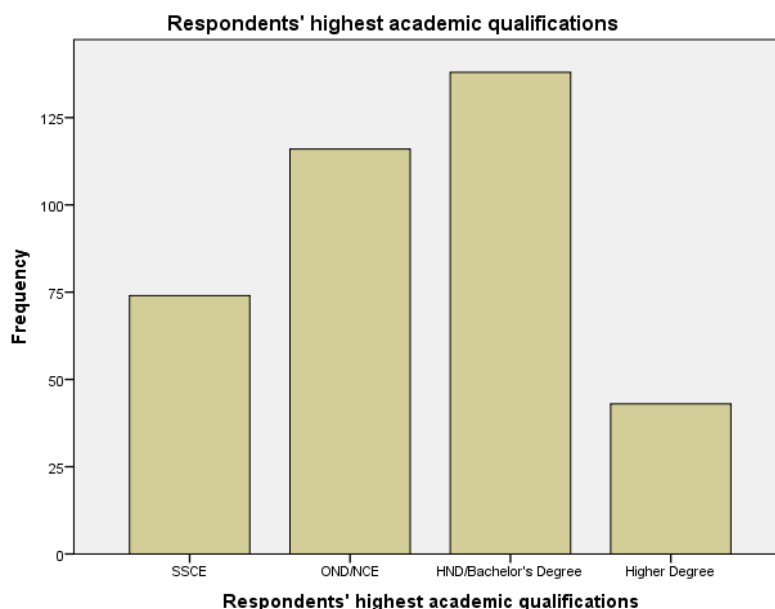


Table and chart 5 above shows that 74 respondents representing 19.9% were had senior secondary certificate as their highest academic qualifications, 116 respondents representing 31.3% had either OND/NCE, 138 respondents representing 37.2% had either HND/Bachelor's Degree while 43 respondents representing 11.6% had higher degrees.

Table and Chat 6: Respondents' occupation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Unemployed	66	17.8	17.8	17.8
	Business	45	12.1	12.1	29.9
	Civil/public servant	170	45.8	45.8	75.7
	Student	79	21.3	21.3	97.0
	Artisan/craft	11	3.0	3.0	100.0
	Total	371	100.0	100.0	

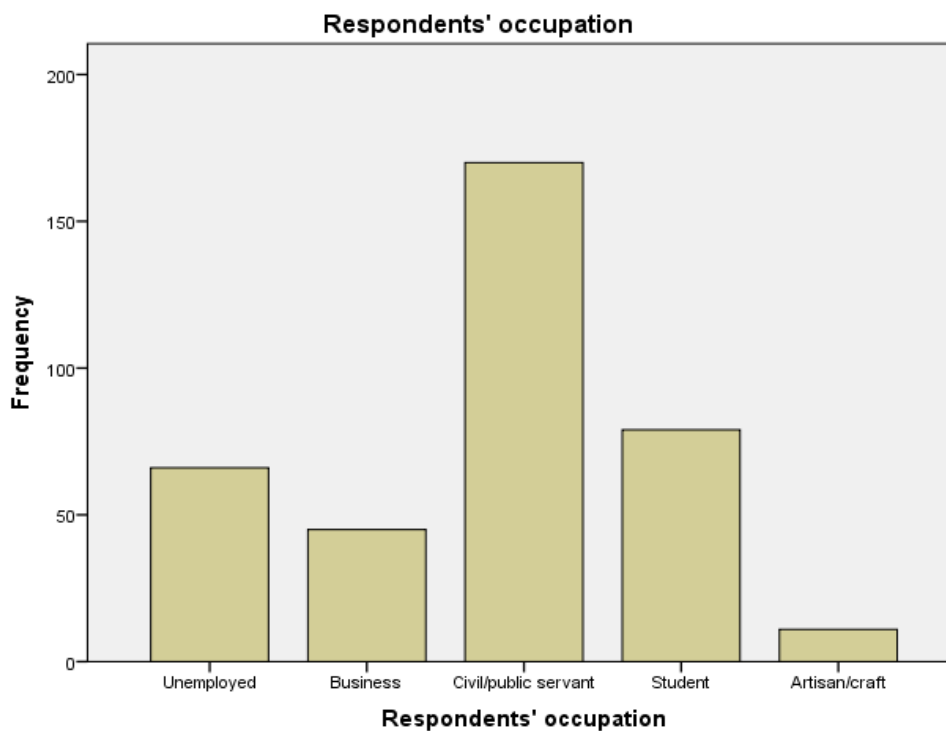
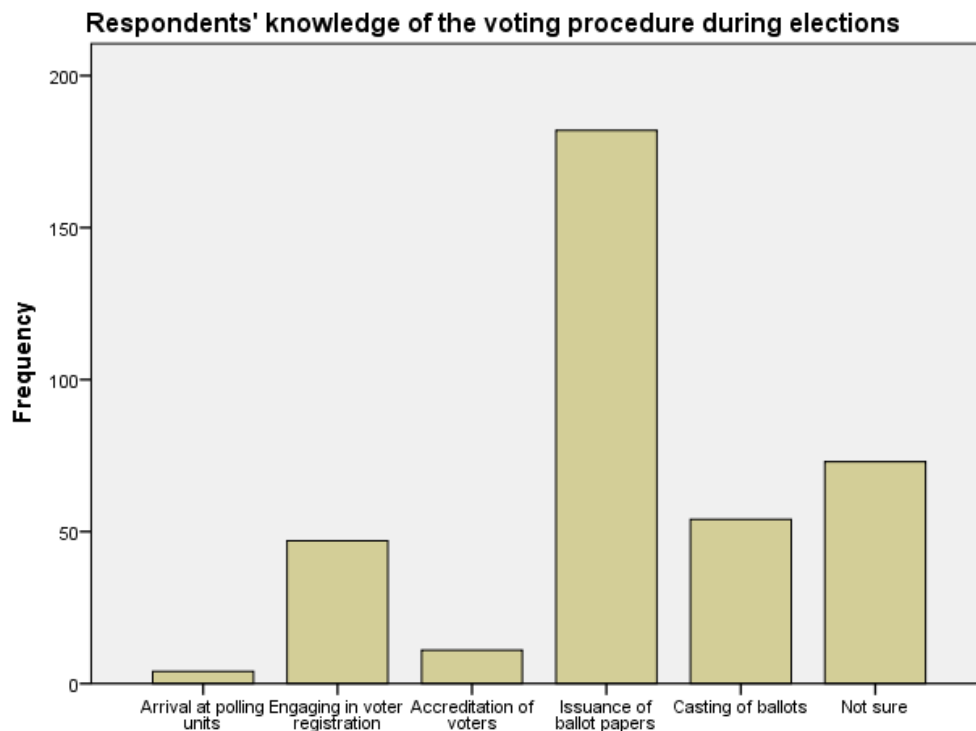


Table and chart 6 above show respondents' occupation. From the table and chart, 66 respondents representing 17.8% were not employed, 45 respondents representing 12.1% were into business, 170 respondents representing 45.8% were civil/public servants, 79 respondents representing 21.3% were students while 11 respondents representing 3.0% were artisans/craft persons.

Table and Chart 7: Respondents' knowledge of the voting procedure during elections

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Arrival at polling units	4	1.1	1.1	1.1
	Engaging in voter registration	47	12.7	12.7	13.7
	Accreditation of voters	11	3.0	3.0	16.7
	Issuance of ballot papers	182	49.1	49.1	65.8
	Casting of ballots	54	14.6	14.6	80.3
	Not sure	73	19.7	19.7	100.0
	Total	371	100.0	100.0	

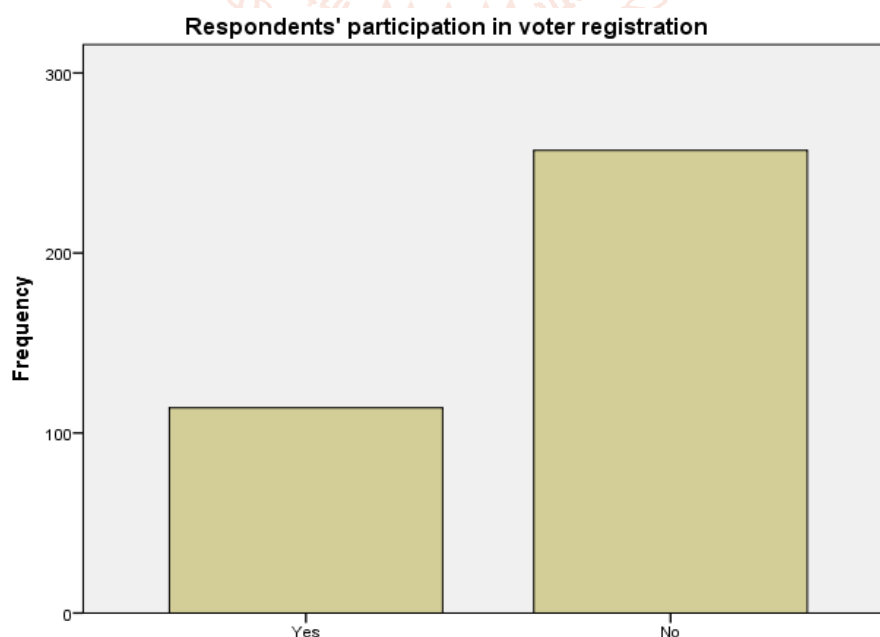


Respondents' knowledge of the voting procedure during elections

Table and chart 7 above shows the respondents' knowledge of the voting procedure during elections. The respondents were asked to identify the option that is not among the voting procedure in an election. Data in the table and chart show that 4 respondents representing 1.1% indicated arrival at the polling units, 47 respondents representing 12.7% stated engaging in voter registration, 11 respondents representing 3.0% indicated accreditation of voters, 182 respondents representing 49.1% said issuance of ballot papers, 54 respondents representing 14.6% stated casting of ballots while 73 respondents representing 19.7% were not sure.

Table and Chart 8: Respondents' participation in voter registration

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	114	30.7	30.7	69.3
	No	257	69.3	69.3	100.0
	Total	371	100.0	100.0	



Respondents' participation in voter registration

Table and chart 8 above shows the respondents' participation in voter registration. Data in the table and chart show that 114 respondents representing 30.7% have done their voter registration while 257 respondents representing 69.3% are yet to register.

Table and Chart 9: Respondents' membership of political parties

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	94	25.3	25.3	25.3
	No	277	74.7	74.7	100.0
	Total	371	100.0	100.0	

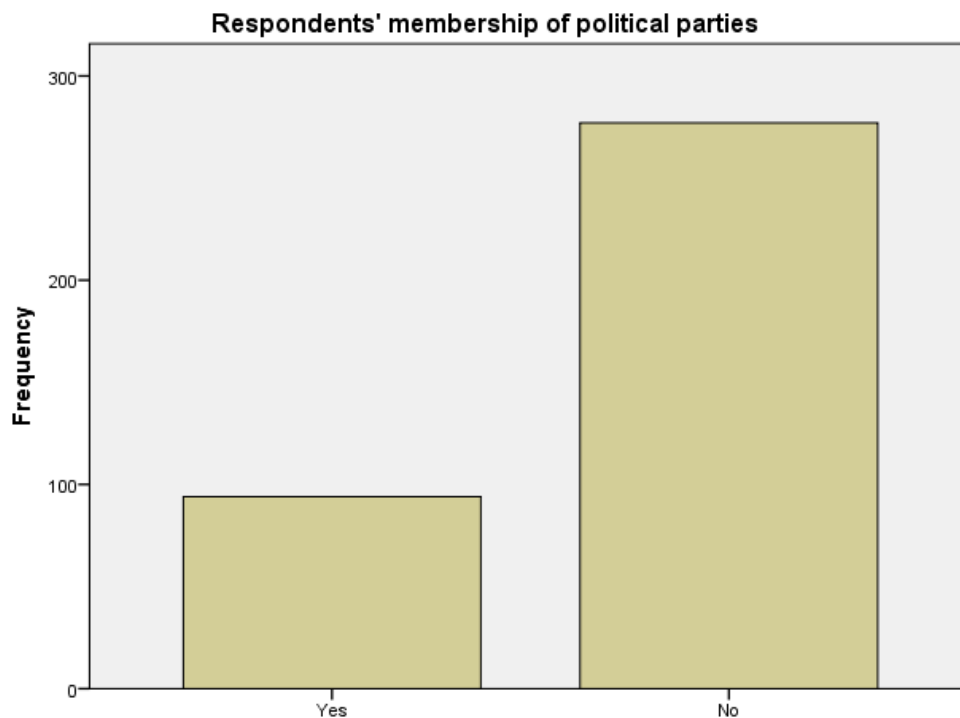
**Respondents' membership of political parties**

Table and chart 9 above shows the respondents' membership of political parties. Data in the table and chart show that 94 respondents representing 25.3% are members of political parties while 277 respondents representing 74.7% are yet to register for membership of political parties.

Table and Chart 10: Whether respondents have ever contested for any political positions

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	38	10.2	10.2	10.2
	No	333	89.8	89.8	100.0
	Total	371	100.0	100.0	

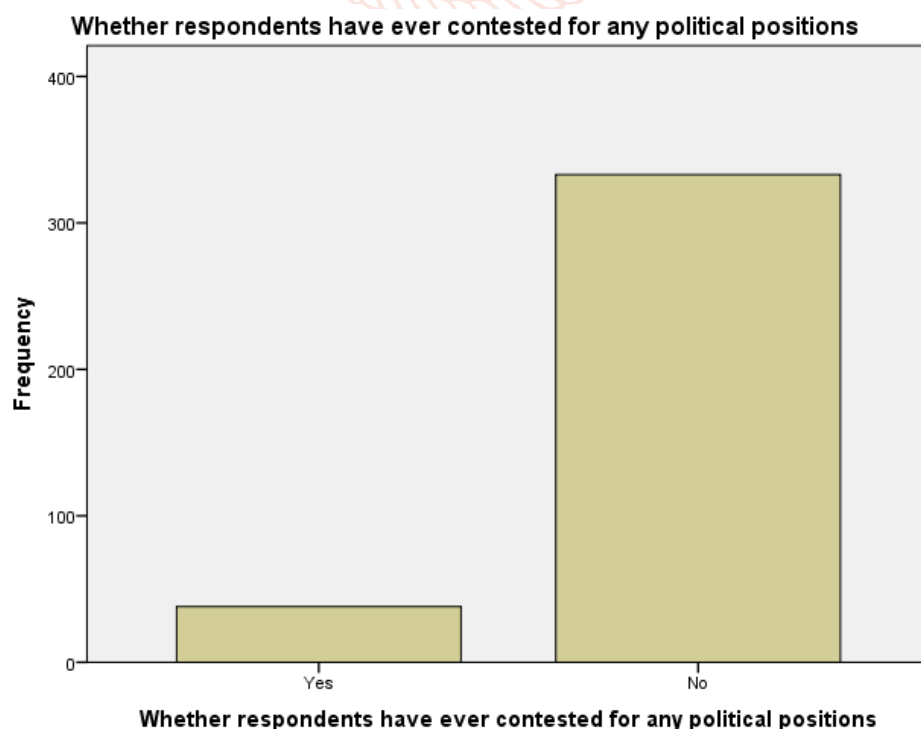
**Whether respondents have ever contested for any political positions**

Table and chart 10 above shows whether respondents have contested for any political positions. A total of 38 respondents representing 10.2% stated that they have contested for political positions while 333 respondents representing 89.8% stated that have not contested for any political office.

Table and Chart 11: Frequency at which respondents cast their ballots during elections

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Every election	42	11.3	11.3	11.3
	Some elections	107	28.8	28.8	40.2
	I don't vote at all	206	55.5	55.5	95.7
	Not sure	16	4.3	4.3	100.0
	Total	371	100.0	100.0	

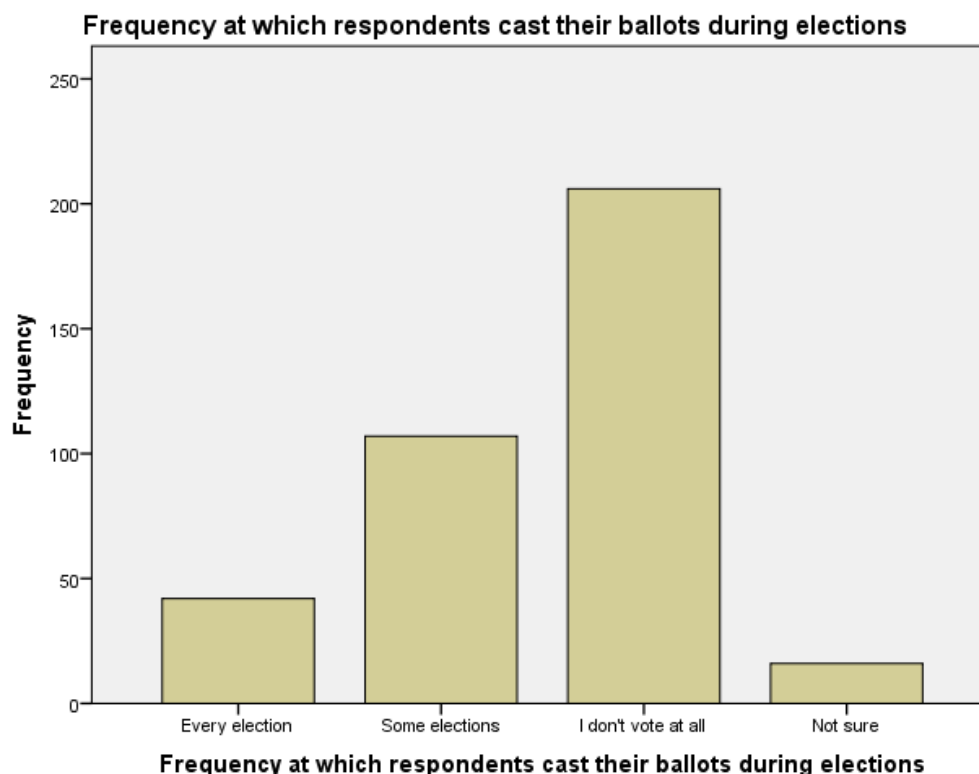


Table and chart 11 above shows the frequency at which respondents participate in casting of ballots during elections. Data as presented in the table and chart show that 42 respondents representing 11.3% cast their votes at every elections, 107 respondents representing 28.8% said they do that in some elections, 206 respondents representing 55.5% do not vote at all while 16 respondents were not sure of how often they participate in casting of ballots during elections.

Test of Hypothesis

Here, the two hypotheses were tested using the data presented in relevant tables and charts.

Hypothesis one

Ho: There is no significant relationship between the comprehension of INEC's electoral materials and the knowledge of the Electoral Act.

Data presented in tables and charts 4.1.9 and 4.1.10 were used to test this hypothesis

Table 1: Correlations I

		Comprehension of INEC's voter education materials	Knowledge of the Electoral Act
Comprehension of INEC's voter education materials	Pearson Correlation	1	.228**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	371	371
Knowledge of the Electoral Act	Pearson Correlation	.228**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	371	371

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The above table 1 shows that the hypothesis tested correlates at 0.228, where the p-value is 0.000. This means that the test result showed a strong negative correlation. The implication of this result is that there is no significant relationship between the comprehension of INEC's electoral materials and the knowledge of the Electoral Act. The alternate hypothesis (H_1) is rejected while the null (H_0) accepted.

Hypothesis two

Ho: comprehension of INEC's voter education materials is not significantly related to participation in elections.

Data presented in tables and charts 4.1.9 and 4.1.17 above were used to test this research hypothesis

Table 2: Correlations II

		Comprehension of INEC's voter education materials	Participation in elections
Comprehension of INEC's voter education materials	Pearson Correlation	1	.252**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	371	371
Participation in elections	Pearson Correlation	.252**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	371	371
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

The above table 2 shows that the hypothesis tested correlates at 0.252, where the p-value is 0.000. This means that the test result showed a strong negative correlation. The implication of this result is that the comprehension of INEC's voter education materials is not significantly related to participation in elections. Accordingly, the alternate hypothesis (H_1) is rejected and the null (H_0) accepted.

DISCUSSION OF FINDS

Research Question One: What level of influence has INEC's voter education messages on the awareness of voting procedures among residents of South-South Nigeria?

This essence of this research question was to find out the level of influence INEC's voter education messages has on respondents' awareness of the voting procedures in elections. Data in table and chart 4.1.13 above were used to address this research question. The table and chart show respondents' awareness of the voting procedure during elections. The respondents were asked to identify the option that is not among the voting procedure in an election. Data in the table and chart showed that 4 respondents representing 1.1% indicated arrival at the polling units, 47 respondents representing 12.7% stated engaging in voter registration, 11 respondents representing 3.0% indicated accreditation of voters, 182 respondents representing 49.1% said issuance of ballot papers, 54 respondents representing 14.6% stated casting of ballots while 73 respondents representing 19.7% were not sure. Out of the 371 respondents, only 47 respondents rightly stated that engaging in voter registration is not among voting procedure during elections. This is so because voter registration is done before an election takes place. The outcome of the analysis shows that INEC's voter education messages have not effectively influenced respondents' knowledge of the voting procedures in elections. Giving credence to this finding, Orji, (2014) found that INEC has not adequately

enlightened the people of Abia State on voting procedures during elections.

Research Question Two: To what extent has INEC's voter education strategy promoted political participation among residents of South-South Nigeria?

This aim of this research question was to ascertain the extent to which INEC's voter education strategy has promoted political participation among respondents. Data in tables and charts 4.1.14 to 4.1.17 above were used to address this research question. The table and chart show respondents' awareness of the voting procedure during elections. Table 4.1.14 above shows the respondents' participation in voter registration. Data in the table and chart show that 114 respondents representing 30.7% have done their voter registration while 257 respondents representing 69.3% are yet to register. Table and chart 4.1.15 above shows the respondents' membership of political parties. Data in the table and chart show that 94 respondents representing 25.3% are members of political parties while 277 respondents representing 74.7% are yet to register for membership of political parties. Table and chart 4.1.16 above shows whether respondents have contested for any political positions. A total of 38 respondents representing 10.2% stated that they have contested for political positions while 333 respondents representing 89.8% stated that have not contested for any political office. Table and chart 4.1.17 above shows the frequency at which respondents participate in casting of ballots during

elections. Data as presented in the table shows that 42 respondents representing 11.3% cast their votes at every elections, 107 respondents representing 28.8% said they do that in some elections, 206 respondents representing 55.5% do not vote at all while 16 respondents were not sure of how often they participate in casting of ballots during elections. This implies that INEC's voter education messages have not effectively promoted political participation among respondents. A study by the Carter Centre for Research (2013) revealed that voter education has not adequately mobilized the youths for political participation in Atlanta, Georgias.

CONCLUSION

In line with findings of this study, the researcher concludes that INEC Voter Education messages have not effectively influenced respondents knowledge of the voting procedure in elections and INEC's Voter Education messages have not effectively promoted political participation among residents of South-South, Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATION

1. INEC Voter Education messages should be packaged and designed to effectively sensitize the electorates on the knowledge of the voting procedure using various communication platforms such as the conventional and social media platforms.
2. INEC Voter Education messages should be well thought-out and designed to ensure effective political participation in the electoral process through the use of the combination of traditional, conventional and the social media for optional sensitization.

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